

Interview with Conrad Ramirez
Conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson and
Miss Paula Boyer - November 24, 1976

TAPE 1 - SIDE 1 & 2

DODSON: Mr. Ramirez, I wonder if you'd tell us your full name and tell us when you came to the valley but I understand you actually lived most of the time in Los Angeles but made trips out here in the early days. Is that right?

RAMIREZ: We moved to the valley in about 1919 and we stayed at a straight stretch until 1931-32-33...we we're in and out. For some reason or another we moved down into L.A. and then we moved back out. Well, I know what happened...all our kids, I mean my dad's and my mother's kids...my brother and my sister, they were married and they had children and that was a rough time. And then we had a big house down on 25th Street, the West Adams District and we all lived together. That's why we left Hollywood and then we came back. And I say we actually Hollywood primly about 1933 and then we came back when we moved to Roger Young Village at the east end of the valley. In when was it? Oh, '46...right after the war...about a year after the war.

DODSON: Then you were associated with our college for a while too, weren't you?

RAMIREZ: Yeah, in 1958 and '59 and then I got a promotion and moved over to Sepulveda Junior High, where I was for 12 years...the head gardener.

DODSON: I wonder if you'd tell us something about your ancestors. You mentioned the De La Osa family, for instance, that's well known in the history of California.

RAMIREZ: Well, like we said, they were like the yankee carpet-baggers, only they were Spanish carpetbaggers. And they sort of took...I don't know if they took it, I don't really know...but we kind of think maybe something like that happened. But anyway, the three Indians, I've forgotten their names. They got the original Spanish land grant. And they got it from them. And that was...they called now...the Encino Historical Monument. But in those days they call it just "The Encino."

DODSON: Do you recall about what year that was that they bought it from the Indians?

RAMIREZ: It's in that book. I really don't know the dates...

DODSON: Fine, we can look it up then. I have a feeling that it may have possibly have been as early as about 1849, but we'll have to look that up and see for sure. Then how were they related to you?

RAMIREZ: Vincente De La Orsa was my great grandfather on my mother's side, yeah that's right.

DODSON: Then some of your ancestors lived in the valley for quite a while then did they?

RAMIREZ: Oh yes. My mother's mother was a Lugo. That's a well known family here in California.

DODSON: The Lugo's are not associated especially with the valley history, are they?

RAMIREZ: No. Not any more than the fact that one of the daughters married into the De la Osa's, that's all.

BOYER: It's 1849...during the Gold Rush.

DODSON: 1849, that's right, is the date that they acquired that property and that's the date they built the house, isn't it?

RAMIREZ: The first building.

BOYER: You paid them \$100 for Encino, that's nice.

DODSON: You've got the names of the Indians there, haven't you, that she bought it from.

BOYER: I don't see them right off...here...

DODSON: Yes, I think there were three as I recall. And the purchase was made from them.

RAMIREZ: And I think they all had Spanish names.

DODSON: I think they did, yes, that's true.

RAMIREZ: It wasn't their Indian names at all.

BOYER: Rita, what is this, Francisco Rita Roe. Or is that somebody else?

DODSON: No, that's something else

BOYER: I'm not sure without reading the whole book.

DODSON: Do you have any recollections that have come down to you from your ancestors about life in the valley at that early time...stories that were told in the family?

RAMIREZ: There's a fly in the ointment. We hear these broadcasters talking about the Santa Ana winds. My mother told me that for many many years that was called a Santana...they don't come from Santa Ana at all...they just come from the desert.

DODSON: That's what I've heard that this business of calling them Santa Ana winds is all wrong.

RAMIREZ: It's baloney. They were called Santanas...that was the name of them. Now he calls them Santa Ana.

BOYER: Maybe it was easier.

DODSON: Do you recall any other things that your mother may have told you or your grandparents about early days in this area?

RAMIREZ: Oh my mother use to tell me about stuff that she had heard about Joaquin ?Murietta and what really happened.

DODSON: We'd be glad to have that.

RAMIREZ: Well I mean as far as she knew. There was a lot of legends surrounding him. He was this very romantic figure I guess. But what we understood or what she told us...then what she had heard...was some bad guys got a hold of one of the Spanish girls, now I've forgotten who that was, and did some naughty things to her. It was his wife I guess, Joaquin Murietta's wife that they did this to. And that's what turned him bad and he started killing all the gringoes he could find. He wasn't a very nice guy either.

DODSON: I think I've heard a story like that, that it was something like that that first caused him to turn to banditry. Are there any traditions in your family of anyone ever having met him by the way?

RAMIREZ: That I don't know. I don't know if any of them did or not.

DODSON: He did live in this area, didn't he?

RAMIREZ: They have Simi...I think I've heard of they called them "hanging rocks" where they use to hang people up there and I believe there's even an area somewhere out in there that they say he use to hide out in.

DODSON: There's an area called the Vasquez Rocks, is that connecting with him?

RAMIREZ: I wouldn't be surprised. I don't know for sure. Incidentally, there use to be a great big oak tree right down here by Nordhoff and Woodman. You know where that little bank is now. Up to just a few years ago it was still there. And they say that tree was used many years ago to hang people from. I was just recently that they removed it.

DODSON: That's Nordhoff and Woodman that the tree stood. Well, that's rather interesting. Nobody else has told us about that. So we're glad to pick up these things we haven't heard elsewhere. Anything that you can think of along these lines, we're glad to have and to record. If you can think of anything else that has come down through your family.

RAMIREZ: I can't think of any offhand really.

DODSON: Can you tell us anything about your early education. Now you didn't go to school here in the valley, did you?

RAMIREZ: No. It was in Los Angeles. But I imagine it wouldn't have been too much different from the schools here. Didn't people here go over to Los Angeles to high school and that sort of thing at that time.

RAMIREZ: When I was in LaCont Junior High, we were city kids. And we use to see the red cars come in from the valley with the junior high and high school kids that weren't close enough...I think there was a high school in Van Nuys and maybe another one or two scattered in the valley, but the ones that were fairly close to the valley, like just over the hill...Lankershim and all in that area...they use to have to come to Hollywood to go to school, after they got out of elementary school. And we use to...they were "yokels" they were "hicks" and that's the way they were treated.

BOYER: Did they kind of keep to their self then? Did the kids, I mean the city kids kind of stayed together and the country kids stayed...

RAMIREZ: No, I think we spent most of our time razing them and stuff like that. Except some of them were kind of rough. I remember one in particular. Do you remember what they use to call a young fellow way back in the '30s and the '20s...he was so good lookin' and all that...they'd call him a "sheik". There were some sheiks in that group. And the girls liked them. The fellows didn't like them at all. I can't understand it.

BOYER: Did you ever come out on the red car out to the valley...I mean did the kids come out from the city just for a Sunday drive or anything?

RAMIREZ: Oh I imagine lots of people did. But mostly in those days when you went for a ride on the red car, you went to the beach.

BOYER: Oh, I see.

DODSON: Well now, I think you told me that you came out to work or that other people did. Do you remember the valley at that time? When did you come out and what did you do?

RAMIREZ: This was in the '20s and a lot of people use to do this. Whole families...they use to set them up in

tents where they'd live right out there in the drying sheds, right next to the drying sheds, out there by Lankershim and Magnolia and Chandler, right in there. Just an old road surrounded by trees but also apricots, peaches, plumbs and well especially peaches and apricots. They use to cut them and dry them and I use to sprinkle something on them. Anyway, this is what they sold in all the stores. You know, as dried fruit. And lots and lots of families. The whole family would come out in the summer. And stay all summer and work in the orchards and the women would work in these cutting sheds, cutting all these apricots. And once in a while we'd get to come out and visit them. You know Patsy.

DODSON: Do you have any idea what they were paid for that type of work at that time?

RAMIREZ: Oh, very little. \$.20 a box or something like that. It was very little.

DODSON: What would be the weight of a box?

RAMIREZ: Oh probably 50-60 lbs. Maybe not that much. Let me see, a box like that...50 lbs.

BOYER: That would be a lot of dried apricots. I mean a box...once it's...

RAMIREZ: I imagine this was shipped all over the world. But it was like a vacation for lots of people.

BOYER: Because they came out to the country.

RAMIREZ: They came out to the country and they still made some money. And of course at the night times they used to provide entertainment for them. They used to have little dances and song feasts and stuff like that. And of course a lot of romances blossomed.

BOYER: That was out by the train tracks too, wasn't it?

RAMIREZ: It's right close to the train tracks. I think it was in between them...now I don't remember whether it was Magnolia or Chandler. See because there is so many changes that have been made right in there. But I know we could get off the red car and just go west a little ways and there they were...all these drying sheds and all these people cutting fruit and all that stuff.

DODSON: You never did this work yourself then?

RAMIREZ: No, I had to stay with my dad and help him take care of the gas station.

DODSON: You didn't get in on these good things then.

RAMIREZ: I resented it but it's what I had to do.

DODSON: Well I can imagine probably it was more fun to be out here then than to take care of the gas station.

RAMIREZ: Right. It sure was.

DODSON: Now those orchards then were in the southern part of the valley weren't they? The ones you've been telling me about.

BOYER: Was this a company that owned the dried plants or were they working for like ranches or around there or what?

RAMIREZ: I don't know. I believe that everybody brought their fruit in there and they probably knew how much they brought in or it was all tagged.

BOYER: Processing plant like.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, see everybody brought it in there. And of course there were apricots and everything all around there. And my brother came out with my mother and my sister, two sisters, and he would...the fellows would be out picking the fruit but all the women worked in these drying sheds. The fellows did the hard work.

BOYER: That is hard, picking fruit.

DODSON: What sort of a social life did you have? What did you do for amusement in the '20s and before 1920?

RAMIREZ: Before 1920, I was only ten years old.

DODSON: I don't think you did very much then probably.

RAMIREZ: Not socially. This is true...oh, we use to...my dad had a real good job for those times and he made very good wages and he always owned his own home. And every summer we'd either go to the mountains or to the ocean for a vacation.

BOYER: Where did they go in the mountains around here? How far did they go, up like Big Bear?

RAMIREZ: Yeah, right up there. You use to have to drive up. No other way to get there.

DODSON: You used a horse then, horse and buggy or something like that, or a car?

RAMIREZ: Oh no no. This was when Model T's were around.

BOYER: That would be quite a trip. That would have been a long time. How long did it take to get up to like Big Bear. Do you remember? A long time...

RAMIREZ: You didn't drive very fast. You know they had those bands in the Model T's that would wear out if you used them too much. Especially the brake bands. You have to use reverse to stop. Do you remember that?

DODSON: I remember that. They had pedals in...

RAMIREZ: Three pedals. Just like a piano. One in the middle and one here on each side.

BOYER: Good grief. How did you use them? I mean the pedals were...one was...were they all the gears. You mean instead of gear shifts you used pedals to shift and all that?

RAMIREZ: Well, all our automatics are just the same way. This is just a modern Model T transmission on their automatics...same idea.

BOYER: It's advanced though.

DODSON: You've never seen, Paula, one of these cars with the three pedals?

BOYER: Well, I remember my mother talking, that's what she first learned to drive, was the Model T. And I remember her talking about it.

RAMIREZ: You use to press your left foot down to get it started. Your right pedal was your brake and the middle one was reverse. And when you wore out this one over here and you wanted to stop, you better hit the reverse pedal.

DODSON: And your throttle was on the steering wheel, wasn't it?

RAMIREZ: Right. Oh, later they put them on the floor.

BOYER: That's what they were models for.

DODSON: You know sometimes we do tend to repeat things. For a while convertibles were pretty much the fashion and nobody seemed to realize that the convertible was like the old Model T that had been discarded as inferior. All Model T's were practically were convertibles. Since that they had a canvas top.

RAMIREZ: ? glass and the side windows and all that stuff...it wasn't even good stuff. They use to crack and break and all that. It didn't last very long.

DODSON: Did you have to crank yours then to start?

RAMIREZ: Yeah.

DODSON: That was another thing Paula, there wasn't an automatic ignition.

BOYER: Oh my old MG had it. That's why I never used it.

RAMIREZ: I think all cars should have cranks. I should think you should be able to start...oh but there is such high compression now you couldn't turn them over with a crank.

BOYER: My car was a '59 but it still had a crank if you had to use it...underneath the front license plate. For emergencies I guess.

RAMIREZ: I imagine maybe there is still some foreign cars that you still can crank.

BOYER: There might be. Yeah, since the English... You were going to tell us about the parties that you went to as a child. You went with your parents to parties?

RAMIREZ: Oh we use to go...we had folks that were dancers. I don't mean professional dancers but I mean they were very very good dancers and they loved to dance and they use to go to dances and they use to take us. That is why when we were four and five years old we knew how to dance. And when we moved into another area and here these kids then...and we were growing up and we knew how to dance and none of the other kids in the neighborhood knew how to dance. And we use to have to teach them all. In our house...wear out the rugs.

DODSON: Do you remember the names of some of the dances that were popular then, what they were like and the names of them?

RAMIREZ: Oh sure. Do you remember the Charleston? My folks, the Shoddish and the Mazurka, I think that's another dance. Then the waltz of course, and the one-step and the two-step. And the turkey trot and all those things. The bunny hug.

DODSON: Do any of those names sound familiar to you Paula?

BOYER: Yeah, the two-step especially.

RAMIREZ: The one-step and the two-step.

BOYER: They keep coming up with different names but it's the same dance and all.

RAMIREZ: Well the two-step is like the fox trot, isn't it?

BOYER: Is it?

DODSON: I'm afraid I can't tell you.

RAMIREZ: The one-step was just a whirl wind. You just went as fast as you could, and as far as you could.

BOYER: That must have been something to watch everybody dance like that.

RAMIREZ: The one-step was a faster dance I believe. And the two-step was like the fox trot. And then the waltz is one-two-three.

BOYER: That must have been something to watch.

RAMIREZ: Oh there were some good dancers in those days.

DODSON: Would you say that the type of dancing has changed somewhat now from what it was then?

RAMIREZ: I'm afraid so. They use to dance together, now they dance far apart.

DODSON: I think to most older people that's one of the great changes and it's a little difficult for them to see how the new style is much fun.

RAMIREZ: Well, it looks like nowadays they're just doing a solo together.

BOYER: Well when my folks dance fast now, if they dance fast, they two-step, but separate.

RAMIREZ: I think they're doing the Lindsey.

BOYER: I think they do. Maybe that's what it is...I don't know, but it's funny.

DODSON: What puzzles me when I watch one of these dances is why you need a partner because...

RAMIREZ: You don't. Because neither of you are doing the same thing. You don't have to. But if you dance together you have to do the same thing, don't you?

BOYER: Or you could end up with her feet. One or the other.

RAMIREZ: One leads and the other follows.

DODSON: What else did you do besides dancing for a good time socially?

RAMIREZ: Well, I was very athletic. And I have played softball ever since I can remember. Back in 3rd or 4th grade in grammar school. And we...or I don't know what happened...we use to have summer playgrounds and we use to have leagues and all the different elementary schools would have a league and we'd somehow get from one school to the other. Everybody didn't have cars. In those days we'd somehow get to these other schools for these

games. A fellow came over to watch us play and he was very interested. He was a ballplayer himself. He came out from the east. He was a very well known...not a very well known name...it should be well known. Milo Laurie. He won the Academy Award the last time Ben Hur was made. He did the cutting and editing of the picture. He took us under his wing, this was in Hollywood when we were growing up. He had a ball game for us every day after school. He'd pick us up at school...even into high school. And he'd take us...he had a pretty good sized car...and we'd all pile into it. And he took us to a ball game and he'd take us home. He kept us out of mischief for many many years.

BOYER: Good grief...yeah, I bet.

RAMIREZ: I'm thinking of looking him up to see what he's doing these days. We had a team called the Seward Street Giants. And we played for 15, maybe 20 years together, the whole group. In fact we had the farm system, the younger brothers of the older fellows worked themselves on to the team as they grew up, that we played for years and years and years together. And we knew each other for many years. And then the war came.

DODSON: That disrupted it.

RAMIREZ: Well, everybody scattered here and there.

DODSON: You mentioned that kept you out of mischief. Do you think there is much difference then and now in the matter of say...adolescent mischief or mischief among teenagers?

RAMIREZ: I guess the kids are most interested in watching the boob tube than sports. Of course we have some kids that do like sports still. But there's not enough of them. And when I was growing up we were all involved in sports of some kind.

DODSON: We hear quite a bit about narcotics now. Did you know anything about that when you were in your teens? Did you hear of anybody using them or anything of that kind?

RAMIREZ: I should say not. I'll tell you the first time I ever had a cigarette. I had a cigarette. The night we graduated from high school we were just going to be hell raisers and we all had a cigarette that night. And I had never smoked before that. Now look at kids are in elementary school smoking and maybe some of them a little

pot. I don't know. I've seen pot on the school grounds myself. I've smelled it. It does have a little different...I pulled up three little plants of it over at Monroe High. And the kids...I spotted these little plants growing in a bed and this was at nutrition in the morning over at Monroe and I saw one of the supervisors. Well, I think he's the Boy's V.P., and I called him over and I says, "Say, you know what these are?" And he says, "Yeah," and I says, "Should I pull them out?" And he said, "Yep." And I started pulling them up and all the kids were watching and said, "Don't!" "Don't pull them out!"

DODSON: They all knew what they were.

RAMIREZ: They knew what they were too. Someone had I guess put what was left of what was his butt in there and there's always some seed in it I guess. And here these plants were about this high.

DODSON: How about gangsterism? We hear so much about that. Did that exist when you were in your teens?

RAMIREZ: No, we didn't...there could have been some over on the east side or down south a little ways. But we didn't have any of it.

BOYER: Did you see any of it in the valley at all in your work here?

RAMIREZ: Oh, in my work in the valley since '58? Not any gangs or anything. I'm sure there are some but I didn't see any naturally. We did notice that from maybe in the '50s on we started to have to have security men on our high schools and junior high schools. I mean most of them retired policemen, which we never had of course.

DODSON: You've seen an increase in vandalism then with the passage of time?

RAMIREZ: Oh yes, just like you have too I'm sure. Oh especially in the schools. They did take ? in. Look what happened to Crenshaw High. You know that new high school down there in where everybody has real curly hair and a little dark complected more so than I am.

DODSON: I don't remember.

BOYER: What happened?

RAMIREZ: I don't know how much. That school must have cost ten/fifteen million dollars to build and they just wrecked it in one year.

DODSON: Is that right?

RAMIREZ: Terrible. And they spent thousands and thousands of dollars there every year on repairing and replacing things wrecked by vandals. And mostly the students probably.

DODSON: Now you mentioned the fact that you have grandchildren and I believe great grandchildren you mentioned. The great grandchild is on the what... But do you think there is any difference in the way you were raised and the way children are raised now? Were your parents stricter do you feel than your daughter is with her children?

RAMIREZ: Definitely. Yes, I remember when my folks were alive and my dad would come home from work and he'd sit down with his newspaper and we got too noisy...he didn't have to say anything at all. All he did was lower his newspaper and look at us. That was it. And we shut up. But what do we have now? What kind of parents? What's the word.

BOYER: Lenient.

DODSON: Permissive?

RAMIREZ: Permissive, yeah that's the word. Which we didn't have in those days. Well, of course we always had some naughty kids but not like it is today. They say though that the percentage is the same, it's just we have more kids and what they do is more publicized.

DODSON: Do you think there would be any difference between the way that children were raised in a Spanish speaking home than in an Anglo home? Was there more respect for parents, more strictness or how would you characterize the difference? Or do you think there was any difference?

RAMIREZ: Oh, I do. Oh, I know...we were taught to respect older people, respect other people's property. That was...and my dad use to tell me when I went out. I always remember, "You're a gentleman."

BOYER: I like that.

RAMIREZ: He was a gentleman.

DODSON: Can you tell us anything about religious life? Do you think that more people went to church? That people were more religious say in the '20s and '30s than they are now? Or do you see any difference?

RAMIREZ: Yes, I have been involved in church and church work and everything else up to about ten years ago we were very involved in church. I sang in choirs. My wife use to help in the ballroom with those little kids like that. And I was involved in their athletic teams. I was involved in their upkeep of the outside of their churches and stuff like that. What was your question?

DODSON: I was asking whether you think there has been any religious change...that people are say less religious now than they were in the '20s. Do you feel that's true?

RAMIREZ: Oh yes, very true. I can remember that we didn't know hardly anyone that didn't go to church. We went to church all our lives. The churches have statistics about the turn of the century...

BOYER: So it's down to 20% now, that's what they said, about.

RAMIREZ: They said it has drifted. People have just drifted away from church and we know why. Churches were stressing too much and it turned people off and besides they weren't giving them what they needed from the pulpit in the first place. Part of the reason. But this bit...the first time you go to church, they want you to pledge. They don't give you a chance to decide, is the church I want to go to or not.

DODSON: I presume your ancestors were all members of the Catholic church, were they not? Have you stayed with that church then yourself?

RAMIREZ: No, no I haven't. Right now I would say I'm a disassociated Methodist.

DODSON: I see. I don't know what your De La Osa ancestors would have thought of that.

RAMIREZ: I know my folks when they died would have wanted to know that we were back in the Catholic church. I never...I was a star in catechism really. We were going to become Catholics. I was baptized in the Catholic church. I never made my first communion. I was never confirmed so I'm not a Catholic. And I became involved in choir singing

and all this kind of stuff with Protestant churches and so I became a protestant. I was first a Presbyterian. I became an elder in the church, a deacon, and then an elder. And we shifted from there and went over to the Methodist church. But I was always doing just about the same thing...singing in the choir and working on the grounds and running the athletic team. I don't know how religious I was but I was involved and I gave my time willingly.

BOYER:

I think sometimes do you feel the same when you're talking about the upsurge of the people back in the church...lots of times if you're raised in a church...sometimes the children go away from the church for awhile but then come back I think because they were raised in the church.

RAMIREZ:

They come back. Well, right now we know there is a youth movement going back to church. You hear about it all the time. The Athletes for Christ and several groups like that all over the country. Big football players and that helps. That's going to help the little kids.

DODSON:

It sets them on an example that they're apt to follow. When you were in your teens, what sort of

work did you want to get into? What was open to a person at that time that would have seemed like a good career would you say?

RAMIREZ: I don't know. If I had known then what I know now, I know I would have gone into some sort of agriculture, landscaping or even creative...

MRS. RAMIREZ: But then all he wanted to do was sing.

RAMIREZ: Oh then I was a singer too and I actually...that was what I was striving for. But in the back of my head I liked the other.

DODSON: We didn't at that time have as good training facilities for that as we'd have now, did we? That was Pierce Agriculture College as it was to begin with hadn't been organized and we didn't have much facilities for training in agriculture schooling did we?

RAMIREZ: In all the high schools we had Ag Class Horticulture classes, Florist-Flowering or Floricultural all this kind of stuff...we did have that.

DODSON: Oh I see, then you did you have courses in the high schools.

RAMIREZ: Oh yes. And I've had courses at Pierce too, many courses.

DODSON: Of course now Pierce has branched out and has a great many courses that are not primarily agricultural but it was originally formed as an agricultural college I think.

RAMIREZ: That's right.

BOYER: What about singing professionally. Did you sing professionally besides with the churches and did you study with somebody or is this just a natural talent?

RAMIREZ: You have to have the voice. They can't give you the voice. No, I did study a little. But not very much, not enough to hurt myself. Because you know there are many many quacks that can teach you things that they have to unteach you later. But no I had a chance just before World War II, I was still single then. There was a man out from the east...I was doing a lot of singing in little small night clubs in and around here in L.A.,

uptown mostly, in L.A. proper. And this guy heard me sing and he wanted to take me east with him. He says, "You can't do anything here. But I can do something for you back there." Now he was the kind of guy that could...he had money. He could go to the Grove, the Ambassador Grove in riding habits if he wanted and they'd say, "Oh come in, come in." No tie at all, that kind of stuff. He was loaded. But we had to wait to see how I was classified in the draft and they classified me 1A...there we go.

BOYER: So you had a better chance as a singer to go back east. Is that true for most of the singers out here in southern California at that time?

RAMIREZ: At that time, yes. And we also...May West's manager, I've forgotten his name, Timmons I think, wanted us to go east. He says, "I can't do anything for you here but I can do something back east for you." Now this is when I was singing with the trio.

DODSON: So what opportunities in the movies then for a singer that amounted to anything, that you could have gotten in that way professionally?

RAMIREZ: They had tough unions. I auditioned several times at my own studio, Paramount Studio. I auditioned at Universal out here. And the first thing they ask you, "Do you belong to the union?" If I belonged to the union, what am I doing auditioning for a job?" And I'd tell them, "No." And they said, "Well, the union is closed. The doors are closed right now." He says, "Do you want to sing anyway?" I says, "Well, I came all the way out here...I might as well." And I did. This was at Universal. Now Paramount, I had a sponsor. I was auditioning for some picture. I might have done real good, I don't know. My sponsor got called out of the studio the day of my audition. I went in cold. Now my sponsor had a good position at the studio and they would have had to listen to me. I know I sang into a dead mike because you can tell. It doesn't bounce. I could see the guys behind the glass. They didn't hear me at all. They were laughing and chatting and here I am singing my heart out. This is what...

BOYER: Oh, it that the way the studios were run then more. I mean did that confront...the unions were very important...are they the same now?

RAMIREZ: It's been the same for a long time. You're suppose to know someone. You've got to know someone they say or you have to have something on someone to get started.

DODSON: The unions are still pretty hard to get into in the theatrical industry I think aren't they?

RAMIREZ: That's right.

DODSON: So it would have been very difficult for a person who didn't know someone in the unions or something of that kind to get started in the movie industry.

RAMIREZ: That's correct. And they had very very...some of the unions were hard to get into and others were easy to get into but they didn't have any power. They were company unions. But what I wanted to get into was a little rough. Every time they would always say, "Well, the doors are closed now. Go ahead and sing."

DODSON: So you became interested in landscape work then instead.

RAMIREZ: Finally. First I went into water heating after I got out of the service. And I got disgusted with

that and I finally got into doing something I liked to do and got paid for it. Which is the gardening and landscaping.

DODSON: What branch of the service were you in?

RAMIREZ: Anti-aircraft. I was stationed on the coast for four years and I never got shot at.

DODSON: Well, you don't resent that exactly do you?

RAMIREZ: No, but I talked to a lot of ex-G.I.'s that resented it because I didn't get shot at.

BOYER: Were you stationed here around Los Angeles now or down in San Diego?

RAMIREZ: No, up in Washington. That's where I met her.

DODSON: Well, can you tell us about some of the historic events you've witnessed here in the valley? The importance of bringing water into the valley for instance.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, that was one of them. I didn't witness it. But a lot of people use to go up here to see it, the water coming down the hill. And another

thing, the opening of Mulholland Drive was a big event. And of course that's right up on top of the mountain over there.

DODSON: Can you tell us about that? No one else has mentioned that?

DODSON: Well, I'll tell you one thing they did have...they built that big fountain down there by Los Feliz but we had a great big enormous street dance. It was in Hollywood. They closed off Vine Street between Hollywood and Sunset Blvd. and they had bands in there and they had street dances and everything in there. And incidentally the Paramount Studio was still right there at the time. And then it later moved down below.

BOYER: This was at the opening of Mulholland Drive?

RAMIREZ: Um-hmm.

DODSON: Do you recall what year that was?

RAMIREZ: Oh golly, no I don't but I bet you could find it somewhere. It was back in the '20s I know. I don't know, maybe it wasn't finished, maybe it was

the start of it...Mulholland Drive. No, it must have been more than that.

DODSON: Did Mr. Mulholland himself have anything to do with that or was it just named in his honor?

RAMIREZ: I believe it was just named in his honor. He's an old old timer. I'm sure he was dead before that...long before that. He's really a pioneer.

DODSON: Yes, of course we usually think of him in relation to bringing the water down from the Owens Valley. I didn't know whether he did any engineering work of the type involved in road building or not.

RAMIREZ: No, I think he was out of it by that time. He was too old. I don't think he had anything to do with the building of that Mulholland Drive, they just named it after him.

DODSON: I suppose you have a pretty clear recollection of some of the earthquakes that have hit the valley, do you not?

RAMIREZ: Yeah, we were...was it February 7, 1971? But I remember a bigger one that had hit L.A. March 10, 1933.

DODSON: Was that the Long Beach Quake?

RAMIREZ: That was the wicked one. This was a panty waist.

DODSON: Not according to people in San Fernando and Sylmar we have talked to.

RAMIREZ: Not bad according to the people that got killed in it. Well, there were a few killed in the Long Beach earthquake too.

BOYER: That one shook really well, huh?

RAMIREZ: That was a funny one. You know Hollywood is like this...Hollywood Blvd. and Sunset Blvd. and Western Ave. and Vermont Ave. and they go clear across town from north to south. That earthquake seem to go in about a one mile swat all the way down to Florence and Manchester in between there, turned to the left, go over to Long Beach Blvd. and down right into Long Beach. That was the damaged area where most of the damage occurred.
Isn't that funny?

DODSON: That is, yes. It wasn't general as you'd expect then to follow these lines, these areas.

RAMIREZ: It just went like that.

DODSON: Well, did you live in an area then that was within those boundaries.

RAMIREZ: Yes, we did. We were living down by Manchester in Compton. My dad had a battery station down there.

DODSON: Can you tell us what it did in your house, in your station?

RAMIREZ: We looked out the front. The shop was in front and we lived in the back. You could look out there and Compton Ave. was going like this... We had a chimney, my mother and I ran out the back door and here comes the bricks flying down and none of them hit us. People stayed out all night, they wouldn't go back in there house. I remember about 2:00 in the morning...I said, "This is for the birds. I'm going to go back and go to bed." And I go to bed and I go to bed and I hear...in those days we had paper on the walls and paper on the ceiling, wallpaper and evidently the plaster had cracked underneath and every time...we were having quakes about every twenty minutes for two or three weeks. Like this (INDICATES SFX-GRUNT NOISES). And here I'm lying and I hear this paper

rustling and I said, "I'm getting out of here, before it falls down on me."

DODSON: But that didn't leave any permanent effects on you...you weren't terribly afraid of earthquakes after that then?

RAMIREZ: There's nothing you can do about it. You can usually tell when one's coming.

DODSON: How do you tell?

RAMIREZ: It seems like everything seems to stand still, just before one hits.

DODSON: Well now, I've heard people argue about whether you can hear an earthquake in advance or whether you can't. Now I think you can. Because I think I heard something before the Sylmar Quake. Do you think that you can or can't?

RAMIREZ: I don't know but I've heard 'em while they were doing their stuff.

BOYER: I think that's what you might hear, especially in a populated area...all the houses crackling and stuff before it gets to you I think.

RAMIREZ: We didn't have any damage to our house at all.

DODSON: That is in the Sylmar Quake?

RAMIREZ: And this is about only six miles away.

BOYER: Yeah, you're close. You must just have missed ?

RAMIREZ: I might know someone on the next street that turned in a claim and got one of those loans from Uncle Sam. What it is...how much could you get, close to \$10,000 and only have to pay back about \$1,900 or \$2,000 or something and right on the next street and you know darn well nothing happened to their house.

MRS. RAMIREZ: They were one of those people. You know over this way, they did have damage. ? Kaiser Hospital.

RAMIREZ: Oh yeah. Well that's...

DODSON: I know that was damaged.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, even inside the building, remember?

DODSON: I remember cracks I was in there shortly after that. I remember seeing the cracks.

BOYER: In Northridge it looked awful.

RAMIREZ: I went into Kaiser in March of '71 for an operation so I saw a lot of those busted corners and everything.

DODSON: That's rather interesting too because no one else has described being in the hospital right after that.

RAMIREZ: It was just a month after, March 2nd I went in there.

DODSON: Were any particular floors put out of action, damaged so much? Do you recall anything like that, how much the damage was?

RAMIREZ: I think they had some floors closed off because they wanted to check them for safety. But we did see a lot of evidence of damage. Broken corners and stuff like this and up in the corner, up like in there.

MRS. RAMIREZ: It was weird to go in and see.

BOYER: Was there any cracks in the walls? I remember there were cracks up at the university.

RAMIREZ: Oh yeah, there were a few cracks here and there.

DODSON: Would that make you a little nervous being a patient there that quickly when there still might be aftershocks?

RAMIREZ: No, not really. Lightning does strike twice in the same place.

DODSON: Well, I don't know about lightning but earthquakes, that's something else again. You didn't have any dishes broken or furniture turned over or anything like that then here.

RAMIREZ: We had a couple of things broken.

MRS. RAMIREZ: All the things in that cupboard just came forward. But nothing broke but are kitchen door didn't stay closed. And there was some glass and on my little what-not ?

RAMIREZ: Very little. We didn't loose \$5 worth.

DODSON: For the record we're talking about the Ramirez' residence in Arleta, which would have been pretty close to the epicenter of the earthquake or the area which received the greatest amount of damage.

But apparently right here there wasn't any great deal of damage then. We've had some rather harrowing stories from people in Sylmar and San Fernando as to what happened.

RAMIREZ: We...remember they shut off our water supply?

DODSON: I understand that happened.

RAMIREZ: And the Schlitz Brewery people had those great big enormous tankers sitting on the streets up in Sylmar and get drinking water.

BOYER: Good grief. You had your water supply shut off too here in Arleta then?

RAMIREZ: Um-hmm. Well we were advised not to use it for cooking or drinking.

DODSON: Because the mains were broken and pollutants were getting into the water.

RAMIREZ: And it created some...it was polluted. Yep. They didn't know for sure but they were not taking any chances. I remember for quite a while I use to go up there regular and have to stand in line. These great big wooden...and they looked like they came

right out of the brewery too. Remember how they use to make beer probably like that...now they make it in the copper things I guess. And they gave us all the water we wanted. Of course we had to go after it.

DODSON: What was the condition of the streets? Were they at much damage, the streets you go over to get up there?

RAMIREZ: Yes, they were. They had to run in lines for water supply. New lines, new gas lines. A lot of places up there. They temporarily ran them right in the street and the gutter. I noticed that.

DODSON: Apparently there were no great fires here of the type that had in San Francisco in 1906, when they had the quake there. Even though these gas lines were ruptured, apparently we didn't have the houses catch on fire. Do you know of any cases where there were fires?

RAMIREZ: I never heard of any. Not in the paper at all.

DODSON: Well, that is rather amazing that we were able to escape that when apparently there was so much

damage to the mains. Was your gas off for a while?

RAMIREZ: Um-hmm. Our gas was off for a while. And the people next door had their lines broken and we smelled the gas and they called the gas company and they came out and shut it off and repaired it. We were lucky it never happened to us.

DODSON: Do you recall how long you were without water at that time?

RAMIREZ: It must have been four to six weeks, I'm sure.

DODSON: Oh my goodness, it lasted that long!

RAMIREZ: There were precautionary measures and I'm sure we kept going up and up the hill after water. It wasn't just a week or two.

DODSON: I had supposed it was a very short time. No one had told us exactly how long that was.

RAMIREZ: Well, it didn't seem to me like it was just a couple of weeks. It had to be more than that.

DODSON: Are you nervous about the predictions were getting that there is a big earthquake due?

RAMIREZ: Nope. Not at all. No way they can tell. They admit it. They can't even tell you it's going to be a big one. They say there's a big one coming. Of course, there's a big one coming. There's a little one coming too. But there's no way they can tell where or when or the intensity.

DODSON: Well, this is pretty much the reaction we've gotten. We've asked people that we've interviewed if they were afraid of another one, since they've been through one or two. But no one seems to be too much worried. I think most people feel there is nothing they can do about it if they were worried so there object.

RAMIREZ: You can't scare people very easy. When they shouldn't be scared they get scared, but when they should be they don't get scared. No one was...I'm sure maybe some little old people were kind of scared. Do you remember World War II...just before World War II happened...when we had that fake air raid here in L.A.? Did you see anybody staying in the house, no, they were all out there trying to see what was going on. Flashlights or

searchlights all over and airplanes buzzing around up there...and some people even took their rifles out and shot up there. And they didn't know what they were shooting at. True.

DODSON: And apparently there was no air raid at all.

RAMIREZ: No, it was what we called later in anti-aircraft, a met message. They were checking wind velocities at different altitudes as this balloon went up. And they were tracking it. And that it was...the Japs were here. Well, I guess maybe they did get here. They say subs threw a few shells in up there by Santa Barbara.

DODSON: Yes, I've heard that story that they did get a little shelling of the coast from submarines.

RAMIREZ: Well, we heard stories that other thing that we had knocked down some planes, they fell down in that Western Avenue call course down in by Gardena.

DODSON: Well there seems to be pretty much agreement now, there were never any Japanese planes over Los Angeles.

RAMIREZ: Right, see. Well, that was just before I went into the service. And I was in anti-aircraft and I read our history. The history of the fourth anti-aircraft command, which was in San Francisco but we were part of it here. And the history told about it. It was just some ? flying, no attack at all.

DODSON: Well, were you in an anti-craft battalion in Washington then when the news of the Japanese surrender came?

RAMIREZ: Let me see, where was I? No, I think...wait a second...when was that? When did they surrender?

DODSON: That would be in the Summer of 1945.

RAMIREZ: No...yes, yes I guess I was up there in Washington. Just before I had come down here. We had created a...I was in charge of a record's section on a firing range up in Yakima, Washington. And they sent us down here in the Spring of '45 to form another record's section down here because it had all been dissipated, sent out here and broken up. So we had to come down here and form a record's section to fire some anti-aircraft outfits that were being released

from service, were getting discharged. And...what was I saying?

DODSON: That you were sent down here.

BOYER: In '45? Were you down here or were you up there when the war ended?

RAMIREZ: Well, after that I think is when...after we finished down here and went back up there was when the war was over. And they sent us down to...what's her name? Old lady Spreckles from Beach Club or Beach House out there in the San Francisco Bay. And being attached to the Air Force, the Air Force had to discharge us. So they were discharging their own first. But we had to wait. So I didn't get out until the 20th of October in '45. Sitting, cooling my heels in San Francisco having a ball. That's a good town for servicemen, or it was then.

BOYER: It probably still is.

RAMIREZ: You couldn't go in a bar and buy a drink. They bought it for you. Or a bowling alley, you didn't have to pay for anything.

BOYER: That's great.

DODSON: Well, we had quite a USO organization down here, did we not? You probably came down here at times after you were in the service, didn't you?

RAMIREZ: Um-hmm. I came down once and got out of uniform and went to the Hollywood Bowl for a big deal at the Hollywood Bowl. Some famous singer was there and I took my wife out in civvies. You're not suppose to do that in wartime, but I did.

DODSON: Did you get into any difficulties on account it?

RAMIREZ: No, no. They never caught me or never even stopped me. They didn't care really. This was in '44 I think. It was about the year before we got out.

DODSON: Well, can you think of anything else in the history of the valley that you regard as especially important?

RAMIREZ: No, but I was...we've talked about the water supply, when that came in. I know that some human interest stuff.

DODSON: We'd be delighted to have it.

RAMIREZ: Way back when we first moved to Hollywood there was a swimming hole next to the L.A. River...you know it comes right through the valley and down into Cahuenga Pass or into L.A. or behind the hill. There was a swimming hole down by Vineland and Ventura Blvd. and kids from all over the valley and all over Hollywood use to come over the hill and the kids use to congregate there. There were apricot orchards, peach, plumb, you name it. And we went there and did our swimming and we ate our fruit when it was in season. The compliments of the farmers. That was quite a gathering place. There was another ice cream place. I think it was north of Glendale...I think the street was called Michigan and I think it's called Foothill now. But in those days it was Michigan. There was an ice cream place up there that people use to travel from all over L.A., the valley, use to go clear out there to get this ice cream...it was so good. Do you remember Curry's?

DODSON: Yes.

RAMIREZ: Well, this was before Curry's and you remember what reputation they had. They was suppose to be

the best ice cream. Well, this stuff was better yet.

DODSON: Would that have been in what's now La Crescenta then?

RAMIREZ: Tijunga, up in there. Near La Crescenta. They were all right in a row there, you remember.

BOYER: That must have been a Sunday drive from the valley. Then I mean, did it take a long time?

RAMIREZ: See, I spent a lot more time in the valley than the rest of my family. I had a cousin who lived out here and I'd spend most of my summers out here with them. He was a musician and I was a singer. Even then I was a singer, just real young. And he used to play his dance dates and I'd go with him and I'd sing with the band and everything else. All those places. There's a place called The Valley of the Moon in Tijunga. It was under those oak trees. Beautiful. I can remember going there many many times.

DODSON: Do you know about where it would have been located in Tijunga?

RAMIREZ: Well, maybe just about in the middle because Tijunga wasn't very big then. Just a little wide spot on the road. This was back in the '20s.

DODSON: See, there's hardly any break now between Sunland, Tijunga, La Crescenta, La Canada and so on.

RAMIREZ: Yeah, but I'm sure this...and they called it The Valley of the Moon and there was a great big oak trees over it and it was open air. You only could use it in the summertime. It was quite a place. Let me see, what else? We've talked about the swimming pool. I played softball on the first lighted softball diamond in southern California. That's in Burbank. The old Burbank Junior High School. It's now an occupational center.

DODSON: Where would that be located? Do you recall?

RAMIREZ: Well, it's real close to Burbank High...I can't remember.

BOYER: The junior high up there. Do you remember what the name use to be of the junior high?

RAMIREZ: I think it was Burbank Junior High School in those days because I don't think there were any...

Interview with Mr. Conrad Ramirez
Conducted by Dr. James R. Dodson and
Miss Paula Boyer

Conducted on November 24, 1976

TAPE 2

RAMIREZ: ...That's what they claim, first ... diamond in Southern California. It might have been the first one in the West.

BOYER: Is that right!

RAMIREZ: But, uh, this was in the '20's, and I don't know exactly when, but I was still in junior high school.

BOYER: You were in junior high school?

RAMIREZ: Pitching with the men. Pitching. I was a pitcher.

DODSON: Is that so?

RAMIREZ: And, uh- Oh, they used to do it right. I pitched for Magnolia Park. Now you know where - there used to be an area right next to Burbank called Magnolia Park.

BOYER: Yeah.

DODSON: M-m-m Yes. I've heard of that.

BOYER: They call still call it Magnolia Park.

RAMIREZ: Yeah. Well, I pitched for the Magnolia Park team. We didn't have - I was the first one from this Third Street Giant team I was telling you about over in Hollywood that came out here to play. And my telling them about it, they all wanted to come out. They wouldn't let the Third Street Giants put in one team. You had to have so many people from the valley on every team.

BOYER: Oh-h-h-h

RAMIREZ: So we distributed the whole roster - the Third Street Giants in two leagues. They had the National and American League. We won the batting championships in both leagues and the team that had the most of our Third Street Giants won the championship, otherwise to...

BOYER: That's probably why- you guys were well trained.

RAMIREZ: This was the group that stayed together so long.

BOYER: Yeah. That's great. You know, one thing I wanted to ask you, uh, do you remember the flood that they had out here? I believe it was in the '30's? Or was it in the '20's? In the Valley? Do you remember anything about it? Or hearing about it?

RAMIREZ: Um-m-m. We had a big flood in the 18 or 1718, but that wasn't here in the valley, that was - wait a second - that was in the Arroyo Seco which comes down from Pasadena, then joins the L.A. River. They had a big flood up there. But, uh, no, I don't know - remember - we had - sure, some big rains out here and some flooding here and there, like Winnetka out there in the West Valley to get this deep. But, uh, no, I don't remember anything like that.

BOYER: What about - do you remember if your parents ever mentioned anything about the Swine Flu epidemic at the time- it was in 1918? Do you remember hearing anything about that at all?

RAMIREZ: Was that supposed to be Swine flu?

DODSON: At the present time, I think that they believed that there was, but they can't absolutely prove it. But there was a big epidemic of flu at least, whether it was that or not.

RAMIREZ: We wore a little camphor bag around our neck.

BOYER: Did you?

DODSON: That's rather interesting, people at that time camphor, I think, warded off the ...

RAMIREZ: The evil spirits.

DODSON: Did any member of your family have that flu at the time? Do you recall?

RAMIREZ: My family didn't have any- any- didn't get the flu. But my older brother and sister got Scarlet Fever during the flu epidemic. Can you imagine that?

BOYER: Oh my God.

RAMIREZ: I can remember ...

DODSON: I can imagine it because I had a bout with Scarlet Fever myself.

RAMIREZ: I can remember them - this is what - we were quarantined too.

BOYER: Oh were you? ...

RAMIREZ: What you had to do before - they looked at the quarantine was that you had to peel. Did you remember that?

BOYER: No.

DODSON: No.

RAMIREZ: You had to peel. Your whole body before they lifted the - I don't know why. Maybe you were still contagious.

DODSON: M-m - I suppose that was the reason that.

RAMIREZ: Maybe. Anyway, I can remember them sitting out on the back with a brick, trying to get your feet to peel ...rubbing it back and forth.

BOYER: My God.

DODSON: Well, you would have been pretty young then to remember much about how it hit other people and other families. I imagine.

RAMIREZ: That's right, but we - we did know that it was terrible and we read in the- or we heard that thousands of people died.

DODSON: M-m. I wanted to ask you about your grandparents. You say they had land in Encino?

RAMIREZ: M-m.

DODSON: Do you recall, uh, what sort of a ranch they had? What they did there? What did they raise?

RAMIREZ: I don't know what they raised. But I think is says something in that book about it.

DODSON: M-m.

RAMIREZ: I think, uh, they grazed cattle more than anything else.

DODSON: M-m.

RAMIREZ: They didn't have orange groves - that's for sure.

DODSON: Well, did they sell that land off then?

RAMIREZ: Gee - I - I didn't ... by it.

DODSON: Oh, I wasn't, uh, thinking of, uh, of the Della Oso's ...

RAMIREZ: Oh.

DODSON: ...I thought that maybe there was another branch of your family.

RAMIREZ: No, no, no.

DODSON: But you were referring to the Della Osos.

RAMIREZ: My dad's side- my dad's side, his folks came here the same way - the wrong way and, uh, they had settled in

what is called Los Antos - Whittier. And, uh, like young men did in those days, he went out to seek his fortune. He left home. He went to Arizona and he became a very, very successful cattle man. He - my dad told me - he said at one time they had so much cattle they couldn't even count it.

BOYER: (Some laughter.)

RAMIREZ: You see, down in the Yuma Valley...

BOYER: Uh-uh.

RAMIREZ: ...where all the mesquite grows down in there, the cow would used to get down in there and they couldn't even get it out. Had terrific roundups. And it isn't rodeo - as in "ro-dee-o" it's a rodeo as in "ro-day-o."

BOYER: (Some laughter)

RAMIREZ: And he says, the cowboy doesn't go like this to rope the steer or a horse, he holds it right here. If he goes like this, he's going to get it- get it caught it on something.

BOYER: (Some laughter)

RAMIREZ: He takes it like this and he goes like that and he knows how - just to flip that - that loop out there. - "Not like this"

RAMIREZ: Like in the movies.

DODSON: At that point, Mr. Ramirez was illustrating the way it was done in the movies, of waving it over your head which he assured us is not the way it was actually done. Uh, Mr. Ramirez, can you think of anything else that you would like to put in enclosing here. We know it's time for you to, uh, leave.

RAMIREZ: I don't think so. Except I want you to have this, uh, fellow's name here, Larry Davies.

DODSON: Yes, we very much like to have that. Do you have his address?

RAMIREZ: I'll give it to Paula.

BOYER: Okay.

DODSON: Fine. Will, we certainly thank you very much for the time you've given us and this will be another very valuable addition to our collection of tapes.

RAMIREZ: I hope so.

DODSON: Well, there's no question about it.

DODSON: You have been listening to an interview with Mr. Conrad Ramirez. A former employee of the Los Angeles Valley college. The interview was conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson, Curator of the Los Angeles Valley College Historical Museum and by Ms. Paula Boyer, Field Deputy to Dr. Dodson. The date is November 24, 1976.